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SUBJECT: BALANCE SHEET ON THE DRC-RWANDAN JOINT MILITARY OPERATIONS
IN NORTH KIVU

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Despite some significant risks and political fall-out, the joint FARDC-RDF operations were a success on the whole. Most significantly, the operations have solidified the rapprochement between the GoR and GDRC, who were at the brink of war just three months ago. The FDLR is in retreat, weakened, and without much of its traditional revenue sources around semi-urban areas, although this could change quickly. The CNDP has been destroyed as a military or political threat to the GDRC. However, the operations did not resolve all old problems, while creating some new ones for the GDRC: persistent criticism from politicians and the media; the FDLR's presence at many remote mines was not affected; and continued questions about FARDC capacity to go it alone against the FDLR, particularly in South Kivu. There are also less clear, unresolved issues relating to the operations and DRC-Rwandan rapprochement: how to handle the return of Congolese refugees and how the apparent shift towards a Rwandophone (Hutu and Tutsi) dominated North Kivu could alienate other ethnic groups, particularly the Nande. End Summary.

The achievements

¶2. (SBU) The number of FDLR killed or repatriated during Operation Umoja Wetu was modest, and the campaign fell far short of destroying the FDLR. It did, however, achieve several notable objectives. On the military front, FARDC Colonel Mamba, who was closely involved in the operations, noted that the joint operations were successful in destroying several FDLR headquarters, breaking the FDLR's hold over North Kivu mines, removing the CNDP as a threat to the DRC population and government, and pushing the FDLR further away from the Rwandan border and into more isolated territory, thus decreasing the rebel threat.

¶3. (SBU) Umoja Wetu also allowed the GDRC to re-establish a government presence in much of the Petit Nord area of North Kivu, including restoring GDRC access to valuable sources of revenue, such as the Bunagana customs post. The entire DRC-Rwandan border is more secure, allowing for better control of commercial and individual movements and reducing suspicions between neighbors. On the diplomatic front, the joint operations allowed the GDRC to demonstrate its willingness to actively implement the Nairobi and Amani Agreements, even though actual FARDC support to the RDF was minimal.

¶4. (SBU) The biggest plus from the operations was a new spirit of cooperation between the GDRC and GoR. As recently as 3-4 months ago the two countries appeared to be headed for war, with each government tacitly (or, sometimes, actively) supporting rebel groups to irritate its neighbor. The Congolese and Rwandans worked out the rapprochement together, without any appreciable assistance from the international community. There was undoubtedly a real desire in Kinshasa and Kigali to improve relations, opening the way for closer economic cooperation and growth in the region.

Unresolved issues

15. (SBU) Many questions remain regarding the separate, but closely-linked issues of how to effect the return of Tutsi refugees to the DRC and how to facilitate the return home of IDP's (with the specter of increased FDLR reprisals). The refugee issue was always a major point for the CNDP. Where to resettle this community and how to do it without aggravating long-term land tenure controversies will be challenging, to say the least. Moreover, according to Kinshasa-based MONUC sources, we have heard that many in the Tutsi refugee camps in Rwanda are unhappy with the GoR's decision to arrest Nkunda and possibly to extradite him. How will the DRC deal with this influx of potential Nkunda supporters?

16. (SBU) Seen from Kinshasa, there seems to have been a tacit agreement between the GDRC and GoR to reestablish the earlier dominance (2000-2007) of Rwandophone (Hutu and Tutsi) Congolese within the provincial government of North Kivu, at the expense of other ethnic groups. Former North Kivu Governor Eugene Serufuli appears to be Kinshasa's "point man" for this effort, but the CNDP's new leadership, with apparent backing from Kigali, seems equally in step. The big losers are the Nandes (Note: Despite consistent support for Kabila, North Kivu Governor Julien Paluku, Nande, is rumored to be in trouble politically. End note.) How this ethnic re-alignment finally shakes out is uncertain at the moment.

Liabilities for Kabila

17. (SBU) Many Congolese who remember previous Rwandan incursions

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into the DRC were aghast when Kabila invited former enemies back. The invitation has caused some political damage to the Kabila camp, but his stock was already low in the East. Moreover, the better than expected outcome (at least better what most DRC observers had believed) of the joint operations may help Kabila to weather any simmering criticism. Pictures of departing Rwandan soldiers have helped to convince much of the populace that the incursion was worthwhile. Residents of villages that the FDLR had occupied were glad to be rid of the Rwandan rebel group. Some contacts even speculated that certain villages may request the Rwandans to return if the FDLR strikes back. Despite these positive developments, the political benefits of the operation remain uncertain.

18. (SBU) The FDLR controls most of the mines it had been operating before. Many of them are in remote locations to the north and west of Walikale, where FARDC/RDF troops never reached. The FDLR was pushed out of many semi-urban areas, but it lost only a fraction of its estimated 6,000 fighters. It may be in disarray, but it has regrouped before and it is reportedly seeking out remote national parks to regroup in isolation.

19. (SBU) Rwanda played a major role in splitting the CNDP, removing a persistent nuisance and political threat to the GDRC. However, Nkunda still retains followers and Bosco Ntaganda's ICC indictment renders him unacceptable as a national military or political leader.

A large number of CNDP troops agreed to the accelerated integration, but most observers believe the integration was hasty and incomplete. Disgruntled CNDP cadres could easily peel off and return to the bush, perhaps taking FARDC weapons or even soldiers with them.

110. (SBU) The biggest potential liability for Rwanda in taking part in Umoja Wetu is its dramatic alliance with the FARDC. Congolese troops have never displayed mettle, they have collaborated with the FDLR for years, and their pay and upkeep is always uncertain. CNDP troops may add some backbone to forward elements, but the FDLR simply does not fear the FARDC as it fears the RDF. In the days and weeks ahead, the FARDC could face real battles. There are rumors that the RDF could re-enter the DRC, if the FDLR becomes too active.

Nevertheless, with its back against the wall, we suspect the FDLR will regain some of the ground it lost during the operations. How the FARDC, with MONUC support, performs against the FDLR in South Kivu will be an important indicator of FARDC capacity and

willingness to maintain the pressure.

¶11. (SBU) Comment: The status quo was not tenable and the joint operations deserved, and received, support from the international community. While the FDLR had not caused major problems in the Kivus recently, its very presence made a mockery of the Nairobi Communique and the Amani Peace Process. Cooperation and good relations between the GDRC and GoR remains the key to long-term stability in the region. Kabila's decision to invite the RDF into North Kivu was courageous, made necessary through repeated military failures to deal with the CNDP. Kabila, whose popularity in the region had plummeted, has bought some time, and, on the whole, the operation had more pluses than minuses. The FDLR may recover, but the CNDP is unlikely to rise from the ashes. End comment.

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